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THE FÉSOLE CLUB PAPERS.

BY W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

II.—THE BOUGHS OF THE BRANSTOCK.

At their third lesson, usually, beginners in landscape-drawing ask, "Please show us how to do trees!" And though the Fésole Club is not intended for landscape only, the request is sure to come, and may be forestalled in this second lesson. It is a very reasonable request, too, so long as you understand that there is no royal road to doing trees, and that no rule of thumb, nor secret of the brush, is worth having compared with an observant eye and a trained hand.

A tree in summer is a very difficult thing to draw adequately; the best of painters can only tell some of the facts about it. A conventional or symbolic manner of tree-drawing may be learnt with ease; but what is it worth? When you are a skilled painter you may adopt any conventional manner that you find to express your own feeling and satisfy your artistic conscience. But, to begin, you must begin with the simplest facts, taking a few at a time. In the winter half of the year trees are not such hopeless subjects, because they have no twinkling, troublesome leaves upon them; we can study their boughs in peace, and wait until summer to attack the second half of the problem—the foliage.

It is not for the sake of the anatomy that we should do this: for anatomy, the scientific knowledge of the structure, will help us very little. An artist's business is to draw what he sees—the external appearance and the expression of life and character. You might study a hundred grinning skulls and be less able than ever to catch your friend's smile and glance, which are just what you want, as an artist, to record: not the orbital indices and dental formulæ, which are affairs of science, not of art. So you may know all about the botany of a tree, its fibrous structure, mechanical stability, and so forth, and still care nothing for its own self, its life and character.

In front of my window there used to be an old oak which in summer was one huge cloud of foliage. Early in the morning, with the sun full on it, you saw a great flat mass of indistinguishable, interwoven colour; shadowless and motionless against an opaline background of hazy fellside; with tender blue coming behind its topmost crown, and its lower boughs faintly relieved in warm light against the deeper azure of the undisturbed lake, beneath the reflected rocks and copsewood of heights beyond. It was a single mass of sweet harmony, with not even the accentuation of a strong note of light or dark; all in pure modulation of transparent colour—the delicatest *aubade* of a full orchestra playing *pianissimo*. To paint it!—well, it might have been attempted by Turner, almost achieved by Alfred Hunt; but what would a botanist have seen in it or done with it?

And then, as the sun moved round, little shadows crept in among the boughs, and the shaping of the tree began to be visible. Out of the majestic mist of greenery there gradually emerged a solid dome, overarching a great temple as it were—storeys piled on storeys, crypts beneath and chambers above, between thick masses of leafage, interconnected by curious galleries and crooked stairways running along the lesser branches and many-corridored complexities, like a palace of fairyland. Through the midst of it you could just trace the great trunk like the Branstock of the mythic hall of King Völsung, who (says the Saga) "let build a noble hall in such a wise, that a big oak-tree stood therein, and the limbs of the tree blossomed fair out over the roof of the hall, while below stood the trunk within it; and the said trunk did men call Branstock." It was indeed the palace of the birds; for in every room of it the leaf-curtains shadowed happy tenanted nests; and you could watch the flash of wings going in and out of deep recesses, as parent birds carried the morning meal to their young. You could not draw the glittering and the fluttering and the singing that made the summer morning an enchanted hour; but if you knew how, and loved it well enough, you could have studied out the solid leaf-masses, and suggested the cavernous chambers of the great oak—but not by help of botany or knowledge of tree-anatomy. It was the aspect, the appearance to an admiring eye, the expression of life and character, that made it a subject for an artist.

So then, in this preliminary lesson of the leafless oak, we are not to suppose that a study of bare boughs will put us far on the way to painting foliage; but it will teach us some facts about trees which hasty sketchers are apt to overlook, and some principles of drawing, some tricks of fence with brush-point and edge, which will stand us in good stead later on.

First of all, to get the outline of the whole, as seen against the sky; for it *has* an outline as a whole, like the lemon we did last month—that is to say, a limit beyond which the branches do not reach, but touched by them, as if there were a gossamer net, thrown over the tree and drawn deftly round it. The outline need not follow every little indentation between twig and twig; it is to “block out” the main contour, so that we may not find, after labouring at the boughs, that our tree is without balance or character. It has been said that the outlines of different species of trees resemble the outlines of their leaves, more or less; and you observe that the birch is, in general shape, broad at the base from its slender stem; the fir, at a distance, is a spike; and the outline of our oak—with many and varying indentations, not angular and spiky, but forming curved bays and swelling promontories—does somewhat resemble an oakleaf.

The next thing is to indicate the position and direction of the stem and boughs, without attempting their thickness yet awhile: the stem, fairly upright and straight, with a little curvature in its upper part; the main boughs, at all angles to the stem. And here you begin to feel that the tree is not a flat thing like a pressed fern, or a seaweed dried upon paper. It is a solid mass; that is, some branches come towards you, and some retreat, foreshortened in perspective; though the perspective is such as no mathematical rule can teach nor instrument draw. Even those boughs which stand out to right and left of the stem, and at first seem to be quite without foreshortening, when you come to look at them are found to be full of twist and turn, sometimes advancing and sometimes retiring a little; so that there is nothing that is not in perspective. How are we to give the look of this transparent solidity? If we saw the tree in a fog, the farther branches would be fainter and the nearer ones darker; but this is not in a fog, and there is practically no aerial perspective to help us out. There are parts of the more distant

boughs which are quite sharp and distinct, and some of the near branches are so faint, where the light comes on them, that they can hardly be distinguished. The only way is to draw correctly, and trust to honest rightness as the best policy. Get all the main lines into their proper places, neglecting detail; and you will find that, in spite of difficulty, your drawing is beginning to look like a solid tree—a tree that you can *see into*. This is the second thing to be learnt about trees.

The third stage is to give the proper thickness to the main boughs. You observe that the trunk is thickest at the base; and wherever a bough shoots out from it, it must be diminished, as a matter of course, by the substance of that bough. The trunk above the fork, *plus* the bough, equals the trunk below the fork. But it does not look so at first sight; the diminution seems smaller than you might perhaps expect, because the substance of the bough is almost lost in the trunk, as when a little soap-bubble loses itself in a big one: consequently the stem is diminished by only a fraction of the breadth of that bough. This happens everywhere, at every fork, down to the smallest. No compasses can measure and divide the breadth of all your boughs and twigs; it must be done by the eye and the hand; and so many little twigs part from every branch that the diminution goes on from root to top almost imperceptibly, never to be measured or done by rule. But if you understand this principle of tree-architecture you will be on your guard against drawing the stem like a post, or the boughs like a bundle of worms, as some too careless artists have done; and, on the other hand, you will not make them diminish too rapidly, by fits and starts, but in their true amount of tapering—small by degrees and beautifully less. And when you have thoroughly felt this beauty in trees you will feel it in drawing human limbs when you come to try them.

Fourth stage. All these boughs, even in the stiffest oak, radiate from the root. You notice that fact much more in an ash or a birch, but we choose an oak for this lesson because it is important to see that this is a law of growth which no trees can really evade. The branches are not like arrows shot into the stem, nor rafters laid against it, even in fir-trees. They start from it like branch railway-lines, along which the

sap must run without turning such awkward corners as would cause stoppage or congestion of traffic. Notice the junction of the main boughs with the oak-trunk, and you will see how cunningly they turn at the last moment and join the main line. The only exception is in the case of the lower boughs of a very old tree, in which the later growths of the huge trunk have overlaid and concealed the original point of junction.

And fifthly, all these boughs are curved. The stem itself is not as straight as a pillar; it leans a little this way, and again a little the other way. In the older branches, what with the wreckage of many winters and the stiffening overgrowth of many summers, their first springing leap into life has been sobered down into steady-going strength and stubbornness; but you will not find a straight line. Every inch of bough is curved, more or less; subtly and stiffly in places, but still curved. The very stiffness of the curvature is part of the character of the thing: an oak-bough is nothing like a worm, it does not lie along the ground in floppy, wriggling indecision. Perhaps I do worms a wrong; so let us say, a bit of soft string or knitting-wool, flung loosely on the table—curved, but not in living curvature—undulating, but not in lines of action. Think of what an oak-bough has to do for its living; how it wants to reach light and air. But when it starts from a stem already standing straight up, it must strike out in some other direction, and struggle to get away from the interference of the stem and the leaves above it and around it; and at the same time it must resist the temptation to succumb to gravity and sink downwards to the earth; which if it did, it would lose all. So there are many different forces at work to guide the bough and pull it in different ways, at different times and stages of its growth:—escape from interference on various sides, struggle against the attraction of gravitation, and aspiration to light and air. No wonder it never grows straight; but, energetic thing as it is, it would be a wonder if it ever looked limp.

Now that you have noticed the fact, and the nature of living, springing curvature as contrasted with dead, inert wriggle, you have only to look at your boughs and do your best to give their true lines; and having completed the main

branches go on, as time and patience serve, to the more obviously and gracefully curved twigs, putting in as many as you can with care, and not resting satisfied with mere scrabble and fuzziness. This you can do with any leafless tree in wood, park or garden. It need not be a particularly noble or finely grown specimen; it had better not be some rarity which you fancy because of its strangeness, but such a tree as you are sure to find not far away, standing well against the sky or plain background of wall. Keep these points or stages in mind, and try for one at a time—(1) Outline of whole tree, (2) placing and perspective of main boughs, (3) their thickness and tapering, (4) their radiation, (5) their curvature, and (6) the smaller twigs.

Then to paint what you have pencilled, for by now it is likely that your drawing will be rather messy, and you will be glad of the opportunity of fixing the true lines in colour, and then cleaning away the mistakes with indiarubber or bread. Take a brush with a point to it, and paint your tree, the finer boughs with the point, the broader with the edge. If you are a town-dweller perhaps lampblack will be colour enough; but if you live in the country, and especially if you work on a sunny day, you will find many pretty warm colours in the stem and greater branches, and purple greys in the shadows and across them. It would be wiser not to attempt a background; the tree is troublesome enough in itself. The drawing will not, perhaps, be a very beautiful picture; the value will be in what you learn rather than in what you produce. It is to give you power, to put a weapon in your hands, that I ask you to take all this trouble. Do you remember how the story of the Branstock ended?—how one evening an old man, one-eyed, whom they knew for Father Odin, came and smote his sword to the hilt into the trunk and said, "Whoso draweth this sword from this stock shall have the same as a gift from me, and shall find in good sooth that never bare he better sword in hand than this is."

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In this second month our correspondence class already began to get into difficulties. A quotation from the manuscript criticism sent round with the portfolio of drawings will show what the difficulties were:—

"In writing the article I omitted to consult the clerk of the weather, and entirely failed to foresee that some of the

members would be prevented by east winds from working out of doors. I had hoped, however, that most—if not all—the members would be able to find a window in their own house or in a friend's, from which a tree would be visible; and I am greatly concerned to hear that one 'cannot find a tree within a mile' of her home. A country in which trees do not exist, or are hidden by fog, or are made inaccessible by storm and cold in April, is unfortunately situated for Fine Art. When Mr. Ruskin abused the developments of modern civilisation, the destruction of the 'country,' the smoke-fogs and 'storm-wind of the nineteenth century,' he had some reason for his bitterness, after all!"

To avoid this difficulty, in the following year the subject was varied thus:—"Students who cannot see a tree from a window, or find it too cold for out-of-doors sketching, can draw a bough such as may be picked up in any country walk, blown from a tree, or broken—with permission—from a hedge. The bough should be pretty well set with twigs, and not too much battered to look like a miniature tree when planted in the room in a flower pot or in a pile of books. If you happen to find a hazel, and like playing with your work as most people with imagination do, you might hang a couple of Christmas tree tinsel fruits on the leafless twigs and illustrate the rhyme, 'I had a little nut tree.' But in any case, spread a sheet or a white paper behind the bough, since you cannot possibly follow out the twigs if they come against the furniture, pictures and wall-patterns which crowd the ordinary dwelling-room." There is a way out of most difficulties, and this gave some pretty results.

With the portfolio I sent round some plates from *Modern Painters* to illustrate the subject; "The Aspen," to show how delicately and thoroughly such a leafless tree might be drawn; "Good and Bad Tree-drawing," with some necessary elucidation from the text; and "The Dryad's Toil" and "Young Ivy," to exemplify bough-drawing and springing curvature.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF ARTISTIC FEELING IN THE YOUNG.

BY CANON NORRIS.

THERE is much misleading talk in these days about "Art." We have "art" schools, and "art" lectures, and "art" classes, and "art" professors, and "art" students. We have even "art" fabrics and "art" colours,—and lowest degradation of all,—we have the "art style" in furniture, fenders and gas fittings. Now this is all wrong, and all very misleading. It is apt to give the impression—it certainly has given the impression—that art is a quality which can be taught or created, or even manufactured by machinery. The young man who has attended certain classes or gone through certain courses of instruction and obtained stated qualifications, believes himself on these grounds to be an artist. He begins to give lessons: he takes a room: he puts up a brass plate—"John Smith, Art Master,"—and henceforward is known as Mr. Smith, the Artist.

Now this would not matter so much if Mr. Smith did not give lessons, and otherwise spread it about amongst the young people and the aspiring parents of his neighbourhood, that "art" can be taught. A worse thing still happens—Mr. Smith means to get on; he has his eyes open to the trend of public life and municipal institutions.

To his artistic qualifications, he adds many certificates or proficiency in the elements of various sciences or of various industries. He can teach designing, weaving, dyeing or mining construction, machine drawing, etc., etc. And he applies for, and gets, a position as head master of the "School of Art" in a provincial town.

Here the matter becomes really serious, because this gives him considerable influence.

There is even a movement afoot at the present moment to put the "art" teaching in all our elementary schools under